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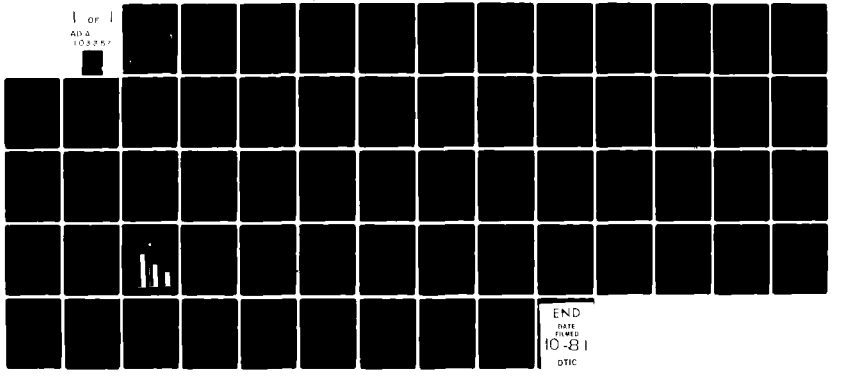

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Employee Commitment to Organizations: A Conceptual Review

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This report summarizes available theory and research on organizational commitment. Competing definitions of commitment are reviewed and an integrated definition is offered. Typologies of commitment are reviewed. Finally, the empirical literature bearing on antecedents and consequences of organizational commitment are reviewed.

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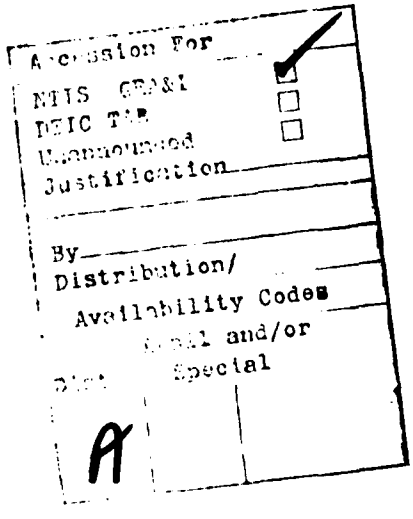
A modified version of this paper will appear in the forthcoming book by Mowday, Porter, and Steers entitled Employee-Organization Linkages. New York: Academic Press, in press.



Employee Commitment to Organizations: A Conceptual Review

One aspect of employee-organization linkages that has received considerable attention in recent years by both managers and behavioral scientists is the topic of employee commitment. This interest has been demonstrated both in theoretical efforts to explicate the construct and in empirical efforts to determine the primary antecedents and outcomes of organizational commitment (Buchanan, 1974; Hall & Schneider, 1972; Hrebiniak & Alutto, 1972; Kanter, 1977; Mowday, Porter, & Dubin, 1974; Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian, 1974; Salancik, 1977; Sheldon, 1971; Staw, 1977; Steers, 1977a; Stevens, Beyer, & Trice, 1978). Throughout these studies, commitment has been repeatedly shown to be an important factor in understanding the work behavior of employees.

Why has the topic of organizational commitment received so much attention? Several possible reasons can be identified. To begin with, the theory underlying commitment suggests that employee commitment to an organization should be a fairly reliable predictor of certain behaviors, especially turnover. Committed people are thought to be more likely to remain with the organization and to work toward organizational goal attainment. Second, the concept of organizational commitment is intuitively appealing to both managers and behavioral scientists. Interest in enhancing employee commitment, almost for its own sake, dates from the early studies of employee "loyalty" in which loyalty was seen by many as a desirable behavior to be exhibited by an employee. Third, an increased understanding of commitment may help us comprehend the nature of more general psychological processes by which people choose to identify with objects in their environment and to make sense

out of this environment. It helps us to some degree to explain how people find purpose in life.

In this paper, we wish to discuss three related aspects dealing with the nature of organizational commitment. First, approaches to the definition of commitment are examined. Second, the literature pertaining to antecedents of commitment is reviewed. Finally, the literature focusing on the consequences of commitment is discussed.

DEFINITION OF ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT

Competing Definitions of Commitment

When one considers the literature on the topic of organizational commitment, it becomes readily apparent that little consensus exists with respect to the meaning of the term. As the area grew and developed, researchers from various disciplines ascribed their own meanings to the topic, thereby increasing the difficulty involved in understanding the construct. For instance, a review of ten different studies on organizational commitment reveals the following widely divergent definitions:

> ...an attitude or an orientation toward the organization which links or attaches to identity of the person to the organization (Sheldon, 1971, p. 143)
>
> ...the willingness of social actors to give their energy and loyalty to social systems, the attachment of personality systems to social relations which are seen as self-expressive (Kanter, 1968, p. 499)
>
> ...a structural phenomenon which occurs as a result of individual-organizational transactions and alterations in side bets or investments over time (Hrebiniak & Alutto, 1972, p. 556)
>
> ...a state of being in which an individual becomes bound by his actions and through these actions to beliefs that sustain the activities and his own involvement (Salancik, 1977, p. 62)
>
> ...the process by which the goals of the organization and those of the individual become increasingly integrated or congruent (Hall, Schneider, & Nygren, 1970, p. 176)

> ...the nature of the relationship of the member to the system as a whole (Grusky, 1966, p. 489)
>
> ...(1) it includes something of the notion of membership; (2) it reflects the current position of the individual; (3) it has a special predictive potential, providing predictions concerning certain aspects of performance, motivation to work, spontaneous contribution, and other related outcomes; and (4) it suggests the differential relevance of motivational factors (Brown, 1969, p. 347)
>
> ...Commitments come into being when a person, by making a side-bet, links extraneous interests with a consistent line of activity (Becker, 1960, p. 32)
>
> ...Commitment behaviors are socially accepted behaviors that exceed formal and/or normative expectations relevant to the object of commitment (Wiener & Gechman, 1977, p. 48)
>
> ...a partisan, affective attachment to the goals and values of an organization, to one's role in relation to goals and values, and to the organization for its own sake, apart from its purely instrumental worth (Buchanan, 1974, p. 533)

Typologies of Organizational Commitment

From these definitions, it is clear that no real consensus currently exists with respect to construct definition. In an effort to shed some light on this problem, several researchers have attempted to suggest typologies into which the various approaches to commitment can be organized. Although many such typologies can be identified, a review of three approaches should serve to highlight the nature of the problem. These three approaches, shown

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in Exhibit 1, have been presented by Etzioni (1961), Kanter (1968), and Staw (1977) and Salancik (1977).

Etzioni. One of the earliest attempts to develop a typology of commitment was by Etzioni (1961). Etzioni suggested a typology based on a larger model of member compliance with organizational directives. It is argued that

the power or authority that organizations have over individuals is rooted in the nature of employee involvement in the organization. This involvement or commitment can take one of three forms: 1) moral involvement; 2) calculative involvement; and 3) alienative involvement.

Moral involvement represents a positive and intense orientation toward the organization that is based on the internalization of the organization's goals, values, and norms and on an identification with authority. Hence, an employee may become involved in organizational activities because he or she feels the organization is pursuing useful societal goals (e.g., the Red Cross). Calculative involvement, on the other hand, represents a less intense relationship with the organization and is largely based on the exchange relationships that develop between members and the organization. That is, members become committed to the organization because they see a beneficial or equitable exchange relationship between their contributions to the organization and the rewards they receive for service. This notion is similar to March and Simon's (1958) inducements-contributions theory in which employees consider the balance between their contributions compared to the inducements, or rewards, offered by the organization. Finally, alienative involvement represents a negative orientation toward the organization which is typically found in situations where individual behavior is severely constrained. In a prison, for example, inmates are "involved" in the organization as a result of societal action, not by their own choosing.

For each form of commitment, Etzioni suggests primary control mechanisms organizations often employ to secure compliance with organizational directives. Normative power, which rests largely on the allocation of symbolic rewards, is most often associated with moral involvement, while remunerative power is typically associated with calculative involvement. Coercive

power is used in a situation involving alienative involvement. Hence, it is argued that organizations attempt to secure compliance behavior on the part of their members by tying influence attempts to the nature of the involvement by the member.

Kanter. In a somewhat different vein, Kanter (1968) has argued that different types of commitment resulted from the different behavioral requirements imposed on members by the organization. She suggests three different forms of commitment (see Exhibit 1). Continuance commitment is defined in terms of a member's dedication to the survival of the organization. It is believed to be caused by requiring members to make personal sacrifices and investments to the extent that it becomes costly or difficult for them to leave. In other words, when members have made significant sacrifices to join or remain with an organization (e.g., apprenticeship program for a particular trade, or simply a long tenure with the organization) he or she would be more likely to feel a strong need for system survival. The individual may come to feel that "I have sacrificed so much of this organization that we must keep it going."

In addition to continuance commitment, Kanter identifies cohesion commitment as an attachment to social relationships in an organization brought on by such techniques as public renunciation of previous social ties or by engaging in ceremonies which enhance group cohesion. The process involved in pledging a fraternity or sorority, for example, signifies a public transition for a pledge from a state of being an outsider to a state of being a member. Organizations typically engage in a variety of such activities to develop a member's psychological attachment to the organization (e.g., first-day employee orientations, public notices of new members, the use of uniforms or badges, etc.). All such efforts are aimed at developing

increased cohesion among group members and hence increased cohesion commitment.

Finally, Kanter (1968) identifies control commitment as a member's attachment to the norms of the organization which shape behavior in desired directions. Control commitment exists when an employee believes that the norms and values of an organization represent an important guide to suitable behaviors and is influenced by such norms in everyday acts. Such commitment is thought to result from having members publicly disavow previous norms where they exist and reformulate their self-conceptions in terms of the organization's norms and values. For instance, the widely-cited "organization man" syndrome in which the lives of employees are largely determined by a concern for what is best for the organization (and what the organization would approve of) represents a good example of organizational norms and values shaping one's behavior and attachment.

In contrast to Etzioni (1961), Kanter views her three approaches to commitment as being highly interrelated. That is, organizations often use all three approaches simultaneously to develop member commitment. For example, an employee may be committed to an organization as a result of a dedication to system survival, a feeling of group cohesion, and an identification with organizational norms and values. In many ways, each of these three aspects of commitment are seen as reinforcing the others as they jointly influence the individual to increase his or her ties with the organization. Etzioni, on the other hand, attempts to develop somewhat broader definitions or categories of commitment and suggests that influences on employee commitment largely fall into one of three categories.

Staw and Salancik. In one of the most significant developments in the literature on organizational commitment, both Staw (1977) and Salancik (1977)

emphasized the need to differentiate between commitment as seen by organizational behavior researchers and as seen by social psychologists. Basically, the point is made that the term commitment has been used to describe two quite different phenomena. Organizational behavior researchers, on the one hand, use the term to describe the process by which employees come to identify with the goals and values of the organization and are desirous of maintaining membership in the organization (see, for example, Buchanan, 1974; Porter, Steers, Mowday, and Boulian, 1974). This approach is also referred to as attitudinal commitment by Staw (1977).

Staw suggests several problems with the attitudinal approach to defining commitment. To begin with, commitment is conceptualized largely from the standpoint of the organization, "and because of this we may have missed some of the psychological processes central to individual's own perception of being committed" (1977, p. 4). In addition, Staw suggests that many of the aspects of attitudinal commitment (goal identification, desire for continued membership) may be constructs in their own right and that summarizing them into a single concept may lose information and may not be justified on theoretical grounds. (This same point is made by Hall, 1976). Finally, some aspects of attitudinal commitment (e.g., a willingness to exert effort on behalf of the organization) are simply verbal expressions of the behaviors that one seeks to predict.

In contrast to the notion of attitudinal commitment, Staw, Salancik, and others have suggested the concept of behavioral commitment. This approach draws heavily upon the work of several social psychologists (e.g., Kiesler, 1971) and focuses on the process by which an individual's past behavior serves to bind him or her to the organization. Much of the initial work on behavioral commitment was done by Becker (1964), who describes commitment as a

process in which employees make "side bets" with the organization. This side bet notion represents a process of linking previously irrelevant or extraneous actions and rewards to a given line of action in such a way that the individual loses degrees of freedom in his or her future behaviors. As Becker (1964, p. 50) notes:

> ...if a person refuses to change jobs, even though the new job would offer him a higher salary and better working conditions, we should suspect that his decision is a result of commitment, that other sets of rewards than income and working conditions have become attached to his present job so that it would be too painful for him to change. He may have a large pension at stake, which he will lose if he moves; he may dread the cost of making new frieds and learning to get along with new working associates; he may feel that he will get a reputation for being flighty and erratic if he leaves the present job. In each instance, formerly extraneous interests have become linked to his present job.

Similarly, Salancik (1977, p. 64) writes:

> Commitment comes about when an individual is bound to his acts. Though the word bound is somewhat clumsy, what we mean by it is that the individual has identified himself with a particular behavior. Three characteristics bind an individual to his acts and hence commit him. They are the visibility, the irrevocability, and the volitionality of the behavior. By manipulating these three characteristics, an individual can be made to be more or less committed to his acts and their implications.

Once these commitments are made, individuals must find mechanisms for adjusting to such commitments psychologically. This is often done through cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957). As Salancik (1977, p. 70) notes, "The power of commitment in shaping attitudes stems from the fact that individuals adjust their attitudes to fit the situations to which they are committed." Hence, if an employee has worked for a major corporation for twenty years, he or she is likely to develop attitudes that justify remaining with the organization in the face of alternative positions. Again, Salancik (1977, p. 20) notes:

> You act. You believe your action was valuable, worthwhile, desirable. You act again, renewing the belief. In time, without

> realizing it, you have made a myth; your sense of veracity and value has been merged into the pattern of action. The myths sustain the action; and the action sustains the myth.

In short, a self-reinforcing cycle emerges in which a behavior causes the development of congruent attitudes which, in turn, lead to further behaviors, and so forth. As a result, the individual slowly increases both the behavioral and psychological linkage with the organization.

Although the distinction between attitudinal and behavioral commitment is a useful one, the assertion that one approach is superior to the other seems questionable. Rather, it would appear that both concepts are useful. Attitudinal commitment focuses upon the process by which people come to think about their relationship with the organization. In many ways, it can be thought of as a mind set in which individuals consider the extent to which their own values and goals are congruent with those of the organization.

Behavioral commitment, on the other hand, relates to the process by which individuals become "locked into" a certain organization and how they deal with this problem. Clearly, these two phenomena are closely related. Hence, if we are to make progress in understanding the commitment construct, it appears necessary to consider both forms as they relate to each other and to the broader issue of organizational behavior.

Toward a Definition of Organizational Commitment

When this attitudinal-behavioral dichotomy is used, the seeming heterogeneity permeating the ten different definitions of commitment at the beginning of this paper begins to simplify. That is, most of these disparate definitions can be classified into either an attitude or a behavior. For example, when we talk about someone becoming "bound by his actions" or "be-

haviors that exceed formal and/or normative expectations" we are in effect focusing on overt manifestations (behaviors) relating to commitment. On the other hand, when we discuss commitment in terms of when "the identity of the person (is linked) to the organization" or when "the goals of the organization and those of the individual become increasingly integrated or congruent," we are in effect focusing on employee attitudes toward the organization.

Since the object of attitudinal commitment is the organization (that is, the extent to which an individual identifies with his or her employer), we shall use attitudinal commitment and organizational commitment interchangeably in this paper. Behavioral commitment, on the other hand, where the primary object is behavior, will be specifically designated as such. In order to do justice to both concepts, we shall focus exclusively in this paper on commitment as an attitude and examine the pertinent literature therein.

Following Porter and Smith (1970) we shall define organizational commitment for our purposes as the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization. Conceptually, it can be characterized by at least three factors: 1) a strong belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals and values; 2) a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization; and 3) a strong desire to maintain membership in the organization. When organizational commitment is defined in this fashion, it represents something beyond mere passive loyalty to an organization. It involves an active relationship with the organization such that individuals are willing to give something of themselves in order to contribute to the organization's well being. Hence, to an observer, commitment could be inferred not only from the expressions

of an individual's beliefs and opinions but also from his or her actions.

It is important to note there that this definition does not preclude the possibility (or even probability) that individuals will also be committed to other aspects of their environment, such as one's family or union or political party. It simply asserts that regardless of these other possible commitments, the organizationally committed individual will tend to exhibit the three characteristics identified in the above definition.

A common theme that runs through much of the conceptual work on organizational commitment is the notion of exchange (March & Simon, 1958). Individuals come to organizations with certain needs, desires, skills, and so forth, and expect to find a work environment where they can utilize their abilities and satisfy many of their basic needs. When organizations provide such a vehicle (for example, where it makes effective use of its employees, is dependable, and so forth), the likelihood of increasing commitment is apparently increased (Steers, 1977a). However, when the organization is not dependable or where it fails to provide employees with challenging, and meaningful tasks, commitment levels should tend to diminish.

This notion of exchange is valuable both from a conceptual standpoint in understanding the construct and from a societal standpoint in understanding that commitment is not simply a means of managerial exploitation of employees. As Buchanan (1975, pp. 70-71) argues:

> ...the commitment attitude is reciprocally valuable. It advances the interests of the individual as he develops the patterns of his work life just as surely as it furthers the ends of the organization. This is important, for it is easy to misconceive commitment as an Orwellian device for subverting individuality in the service of the corporate organization.

When viewed as an attitude, commitment differs from the concept of job satisfaction in several ways. To begin with, commitment as a construct is

more global, reflecting a general affective response to the organization as a whole. Job satisfaction, on the other hand, reflects one's response either to one's job or to certain aspects of one's job. Hence, commitment emphasizes attachment to the employing organization, including its goals and values, while satisfaction emphasizes the specific task environment where an employee performs his or her duties.

Moreover, organizational commitment should be somewhat more stable over time than job satisfaction. Although day-to-day events in the work place may affect an employee's level of job satisfaction, such transitory events should not cause an employee to seriously reevaluate his or her attachment to the overall organization. Available longitudinal evidence supports this view (see, for example, Porter et al, 1974). Commitment attitudes appear to develop slowly but consistently over time as individuals think about the relationship between themselves and their employer. Such findings would be predicted from the definition and available theory. Satisfaction, on the other hand, has been found to be a less stable measure over time, reflecting more immediate reactions to specific tangible aspects of the work environment (e.g., pay, supervision, etc.). Evidence for this transitory nature of satisfaction can be found in Smith, Kendall, & Hulin (1969) and Porter et al. (1974).

ANTECEDENTS OF ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT

The empirical studies carried out on the topic of organizational commitment represent a rich collection of findings both with respect to the antecedents and consequences of the construct. The vast majority of these studies are correlational in nature. As a result, while we know a good deal concerning variables that are empirically related to commitment, far

less is known about the psychological processes involved in its development. In the remainder of this paper we shall provide an overview of the correlational findings with respect to both the antecedents and outcomes of commitment.

Several years ago, it was suggested that the major influences on organizational commitment could be grouped into three categories: 1) personal characteristics; 2) job or role-related characteristics; and 3) work experiences. Cross validated results by Steers (1977a) support the importance of all three of these categories as representing major influences on employee commitment. In this study, commitment as measured by the OCQ was regressed on several personal characteristics, job characteristics, and work experiences. Results, shown in Exhibit 2, demonstrate that each set of factors are significantly related to commitment for two diverse samples of hospital employees and R & D scientists. More recent research suggest the need to add a fourth category of antecedents, namely, structural characteristics (Morris & Steers, 1980; Stevens et al, 1978). These categories of antecedents, along with hypothesized outcomes of commitment are shown in Exhibit 3 and are intended to provide some structure to our review of the correlational findings concerning organizational commitment. We shall brief-

Insert Exhibit 2 About Here

ly summarize the research pertaining to each of the antecedent categories below.

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Personal Correlates of Commitment

Numerous studies have examined the effects of various personal characteristics on organizational commitment. Personal characteristics studied have included age, tenure, educational level, gender, race, and various personality factors. In general, commitment has been found to be positively related to both age and tenure (Lee, 1971; Angle & Perry, 1978; Sheldon, 1971; Hrebiniak, 1974; Brown, 1969; Hall, Schneider, & Nygren, 1970; Morris & Sherman, 1981). Some mixed findings have also emerged, however, indicating that age and tenure are not direct correlates of commitment (Steers, 1977; Hall & Schneider, 1972). In support of at least a moderate relationship between these variables, March and Simon (1958) noted that as one's age or tenure in the organization increases, the individual's opportunities for alternative employment become more limited. This decrease in an individual's degrees of freedom may serve to increase the perceived attractiveness of the present employer, thereby leading to increased psychological attachment.

In contrast to age and tenure, education has often been found to be inversely related to commitment (Morris & Sherman, 1981; Steers, 1977a; Angle & Perry, 1978; Morris & Steers, 1980), although the results are not entirely consistent (Steers & Spencer, 1977; Lee, 1971). It has been suggested that this inverse relationship may result from the fact that more highly educated individuals have higher expectations that the organization may be unable to meet. Moreover, more educated individuals may also be more committed to a profession or trade. Hence, it would become more difficult for the organization to compete successfully for the psychological involvement of such members.

In other research, it has been fairly consistently found that gender is related to commitment. That is, in studies by Grusky (1966), Hrebiniak and Alutto (1972), Gould (1975), and Angle and Perry (1978), women as a group were found to be more committed than men. Grusky (1966) explained this relationship by arguing that women generally had to overcome more barriers to attain their positions in the organization, thereby making organizational membership more important to them. This is similar to the concept of initiation rites as an influence on behavioral commitment, as discussed by Salancik (1977).

Finally, a series of studies have examined various personality factors as they relate to commitment. In isolated findings, commitment has been found to be related to achievement motivation, sense of competence, and other higher-order needs (Steers, 1977a; Morris & Sherman, 1981; Steers & Spencer, 1977; Koch, 1974; Rotondi, 1976). It would appear that commitment to the organization can be bolstered to the extent that employees see the organization as a source of need satisfaction. Hence, again we see an exchange relationship developing between the individual and the organization in which commitment attitudes are "exchanged" for desirable outcomes for the employees. A related aspect of personality is the values held by employees. In this regard, modest support has emerged to suggest that individuals with a strong personal work ethic tend to be highly committed to the organization (Goodale, 1973; Hulin & Blood, 1968; Rabinowitz & Hall, 1977; Kidron, 1978; Hall et al, 1970; Hall & Schneider, 1973; Buchanan, 1974; Card, 1977). Finally, one study discovered that workers with a work-oriented central life interest were also highly committed to the organization (Dubin, Champoux, & Porter, 1975).

In summary, a variety of personal characteristics have been found to be

related to organizational commitment in various correlational studies across diverse work samples. These findings indicate rather clearly that individual differences must be taken into account in any model of commitment processes in organizations.

Role-Related Correlates of Commitment

The second group of correlates of organizational commitment that have been identified in the literature relate to employee roles and job characteristics. Simply put, we are concerned here about the extent to which variations in the task requirements of jobs influence employee commitment. There appear to be at least three related aspects of work role that have the potential to influence commitment: job scope or challenge, role conflict, and role ambiguity.

A good deal of work has been carried out examining the relationship between job scope on commitment. The basic hypothesis here is that increased job scope increases the challenge employees experience and thereby increases commitment. Again, implicit in this hypothesis is the notion of exchange. Employees are thought to respond positively when provided with more challenge in their jobs. Fairly consistent data from various work samples supports this position (Steers, 1977a; Steers & Spencer, 1977; Hall & Schneider, 1973; Hall et al, 1970; Buchanan, 1974; Marsh & Mannari, 1977; Brown, 1969; Stevens et al, 1978).

In addition, several recent studies have examined the related concepts of role conflict and role ambiguity as they relate to commitment. Role conflict was found to be inversely related to commitment in two separate studies, while mixed results emerged for role ambiguity (Morris & Sherman, 1981; Morris & Koch, 1979). Relatedly, Stevens et al. (1978) found that role overload was

strongly and inversely related to employee commitment. Hence, the portrait that emerges with respect to the impact of role-related factors on commitment is that such influences may be positive so long as the employee has clear and challenging job assignments. Where the assignments become ambiguous, place the employee in conflict, or provide excessive role stress, the affects on commitment tend to be adverse.

Structural Correlates of Commitment

A relatively recent area of investigation of correlates of organizational commitment has dealt with the influence of organizational structure on commitment. Significant attention has been focused on the manner in which structure affects other attitudes such as job satisfaction (Porter & Lawler, 1965; Cummings & Berger, 1976) but little has been done with respect to commitment.

The first study to examine this area was carried out by Stevens et al. (1978), where four structural variables were considered (organization size, union presence, span of control, and centralization of authority). None were found to be significantly related to commitment. Subsequently, however, Morris and Steers (1980) examined the effects of structural variables and found, as did Stevens et al, that size and span of control were unrelated to commitment. However, it was also found that formalization, functional dependence, and decentralization were related to commitment. That is, for the sample studied, employees experiencing greater decentralization, greater dependence on the work of others and greater formality of written rules and procedures felt more committed to the organization than employees experiencing these factors to a less extent. With one exception, (centralization), these findings do not contradict the earlier results of Stevens et al. The two

studies simply examined different aspects of structure as it related to commitment.

More recently, Rhodes and Steers (in press) studied the effects of worker ownership on commitment and found that when employees have a vested financial interest in the organization, they are significantly more committed than when they are simple "employees." This study was carried out among matched plywood mills, one being owned by the employees and one by a major wood products firm. This study also found that increased participation in decision making (a related aspect of decentralization) was related to commitment.

Finally, in unpublished findings emerging out of our own series of studies on commitment using the OCQ, the issue of occupational groupings was examined. As shown in Exhibit 4, while mean commitment levels differ significantly across the four organizations studied, no significant differences in mean commitment levels were found across occupational level for the two samples for which data were available. Hence, these preliminary data suggested that while different organizations manifest different overall levels

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of employee commitment, this commitment is equally strong up and down the organizational hierarchy. Top executives as a group are not more committed than service workers or blue collar workers. Although these data are tentative, results suggest that a favorite stereotype concerning lower levels of loyalty among rank-and-file workers may in fact be a myth.

From the above evidence, the structure of the organization does appear to have an influence on commitment outcomes. This trend parallels research relating structure to job satisfaction (Cummings & Berger, 1976) and illus-

trates how structural variation can combine with personal and role-related variables to influence the extent to which individuals see it in their best interest to attach themselves psychologically to the organization.

Work Experience Correlates of Commitment

The fourth category of major antecedents of organizational commitment represents those work experiences that occur during an employee's tenure with the organization. Work experiences are viewed as a major socializing force and as such represent an important influence on the extent to which psychological attachments are formed with the organization.

Several work experience variables have been found to be related to organizational commitment. In three studies, organizational dependability, or the extent to which employees felt the organization could be counted upon to look after employee interest, was significantly related to commitment (Hrebiniak, 1974; Buchanan, 1974; Steers, 1977a). The findings by Steers were cross-validated in two divergent samples. Moreover, Buchanan (1974) and Steers (1977a) also found feelings of personal importance to the organization to be related to commitment. That is, when employees felt they were needed or important to the organization's mission, commitment attitudes increased. Again, in the study by Steers, the findings were cross-validated. Grusky (1966) and Steers (1977a) also found commitment to be related to the extent to which employee expectations were met in the work place, although the finding did not cross-validate in the Steers study.

A further factor relating to work experiences focuses on the extent to which employees sense that their co-workers maintain positive attitudes toward the organization. Buchanan (1974) has argued that such perceptions "rub off" on employees, leading to heightened commitment. Data in support

of this contention can be found in Patchen (1970), Buchanan (1974), and (cross-validated) in Steers (1977a). In addition, research by Rhodes and Steers (in press) found that perceived pay equity and group norms regarding hard work were also related to commitment for a sample of wood products employees. This latter finding also emerged in the Buchanan (1974) study.

Only two studies were found relating commitment to leadership style. In both studies, commitment was found to be related to leader initiating structure (Brief, Aldag, & Wallden, 1976; Morris & Sherman, 1981); in the latter study, commitment was also found to be related to leader consideration.

Finally, an important factor in facilitating commitment appears to be the degree of an employee's social involvement in the organization. This idea was first introduced by Sheldon (1971) and subsequent support has been found by Buchanan (1974) and Rotondi (1975). Such findings suggest that the greater the social interaction, the more social ties the individual develops with the organization. As a result, the individual becomes further linked to his or her employer.

In all, then, at least 25 variables have been found to be related in some way with organizational commitment. These variables trace their origins to various aspects of organizational life, including personal characteristics of the individual members, role-related characteristics of the work place, structural aspects of the organization, and the various work experiences encountered by the employees. What is clearly lacking in many of these findings is an explanation for the dynamics of organizational commitment. That is, we know little about the processes by which the factors identified above interact to influence employees' affective responses to the organization. What is needed, then, is some effort toward constructing a model of the commitment process.

CONSEQUENCES OF ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT

What, then, are the consequences of organizational commitment? At least five possible outcomes have been studied, including job performance, tenure with the organization, absenteeism, tardiness, and turnover. Based on our own work and the work of others, we can summarize the current level of knowledge on each of these topics (see Exhibit 5).

Commitment and Job Performance

Clearly, the least encouraging findings that have emerged from studies of commitment is a rather weak relationship between commitment and job performance. In both individual and group-level studies, few important correlations emerged although the correlations are consistently in the predicted direction and often reach statistical significance (Mowday et al, 1974; Porter et al, 1976; Steers, 1977a).

Several factors may account for this. In particular, following contemporary theories of employee motivation, performance is influenced by several factors, including motivation level, role clarity, and ability (Porter & Lawler, 1968). Attitudes like commitment would only be expected to influence one aspect of actual job performance. Hence, we would not expect a strong commitment-performance relationship. Even so, we would expect commitment to influence the amount of effort an employee puts forth on the job and this effort should have some influence on actual performance.

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Insert Exhibit 5 About Here
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Commitment and Tenure

If highly committed employees are desirous of remaining with the organization as our conceptual model suggests, then we would expect to see commitment

and actual job tenure related. In fact, such is the case. Highly significant positive correlations have been found between increased tenure and increased commitment (see Exhibit 5). What remains to be established, however, is the nature of the causal relationship between these two variables. That is, does commitment lead to increased tenure or does increased tenure cause changes in commitment levels?

Commitment and Employee Absenteeism

Theory would predict that highly committed employees would be more motivated to attend so they could help facilitate organizational goal attainment. This motivation should exist even if the employee does not enjoy the actual tasks required by the job (i.e., a nurse's aid who may not like certain distasteful aspects of the job but who feels he or she is contributing to worthwhile public health goals). Modest support for this relationship can be found in several studies (Steers, 1977a; Smith, 1977) but this support is not entirely consistent (Angle & Perry, 1981). On the other hand, where an employee's commitments lie elsewhere (e.g., to a hobby, family home, or sports), less internal pressure would be exerted on the employee to attend (Morgan & Herman, 1976).

It should be clearly noted here that it is not suggested that a direct commitment-attendance relationship would be expected. It is only suggested that commitment may represent one influence on attendance motivation.

Commitment and Tardiness

In a recent study by Angle and Perry (1981), commitment was found to be strongly and inversely related to employee tardiness ($r = -.48$). Again, the theory underlying the construct suggests that highly committed employees would be likely to engage in behaviors consistent with their attitudes toward

the organization. Coming to work on time would certainly represent one such behavior.

Commitment and Employee Turnover

Following the theory, it is our belief that the strongest or most predictable behavioral outcome of employee commitment should be reduced turnover. Highly committed employees by definition are desirous of remaining with the organization and working toward organizational goals and should hence be less likely to leave. Thus, we feel it is important to recognize the importance of organizational commitment, along with other variables, in any comprehensive model of employee turnover.

In an effort to examine the commitment-turnover relationship, a series of studies have been undertaken among various work samples to determine the extent to which this relationship holds. In all, eight studies of the commitment-turnover relationship have been carried out. Five of these studies represented predictive correlational designs among various samples (see Exhibit 5). In all five studies, highly significant correlations were found between commitment and subsequent turnover (Mowday et al, 1979; Hom et al, 1979; Angle & Perry, 1981; Koch & Steers, 1978; Steers, 1977a). In a more refined analysis of data originally reported by Mowday et al (1979), Mowday, Koberg and McArthur (1980) found that the impact of commitment on turnover may be indirect through its relationship to other variables such as desire to stay and intention to search for another job. This finding is consistent with intermediate-linkages model of turnover processes proposed by Mobley (1977).

In a sixth study, a longitudinal design was used to track commitment levels over time among a sample of psychiatric technicians (Porter et al, 1974). Again, commitment was found to be significantly and inversely related to sub-

sequent turnover. In addition, it was found in this longitudinal study that the magnitude of this relationship between commitment and turnover increased over time. That is, as we would expect, commitment attitudes strengthened over time for those who chose to remain with the organization but declined for those who left. These findings are shown clearly in Exhibit 6. Such findings reinforce the statement made earlier that commitment attitudes develop slowly over time and increase with employee tenure. Parenthetically, it should also be noted in this study (and two others — Hom et al, 1979; Koch & Steers, 1978) that in all four time periods of the longitudinal design, commitment proved to be a moderately better predictor of subsequent turnover than did the more traditional attitude measure of satisfaction as measured by the JDI.

Insert Exhibit 6 About Here

The seventh commitment-turnover study also used a longitudinal design among a sample of retail management trainees (Porter, Crampon & Smith, 1976). Several features of this study set it off from the typical turnover study: (1) The sample is composed of individuals starting out in managerial careers; most studies dealing with turnover focus almost exclusively on rank and file employees who possess varying amounts of tenure with the organization; (2) The attitude measured is the individual's commitment to the organization as noted earlier; most other turnover studies involving employee attitudes deal simply with "job satisfaction;" and (3) Most importantly, the study is longitudinal, individuals' commitment patterns are tracked from the first day on the job through the end of the first 15 months of employment. From what we know from other literature on turnover, this beginning period of membership in an organization is the most critical period for turnover, since that is where most of it occurs.

What did these data show? First, and most strikingly significant (statistically and otherwise), the eventual leavers had lower attitudes along the way than did the stayers. More specifically, the eventual leavers were significantly lower in commitment attitudes than stayers ($p < .05$) on the first day on the job, and were even more separated from the paired stayers in the two month period just prior to leaving (whether they left in the first month or so, or in the 12th or 15th month). Put another way, stayers maintained a fairly constant level of commitment throughout the first 15 months on the job, whereas those who would eventually leave sometime during the first 15 months started out on the job (first day) with lower commitment and their commitment declined (though not statistically significantly so for this relatively small matched sample) as they got closer to the point of leaving the organization. These results are based on a strict longitudinal analysis of the data.

A somewhat different analysis that involved cross-sectional comparisons demonstrated the same effect. This analysis, however, showed the differences between the two groups (stayers and leavers) in somewhat more dramatic form. It used a "last back" technique of analysis. That is, leavers' commitment attitudes measured within 1 1/2 months of the time they actually left were compared with those of the matched stayer group at the same point in time; likewise, leavers' commitment attitudes 3 months prior to leaving and 5 months prior to leaving were also compared with the attitudes of the stayer group measured at the same point in time. What this analysis shows clearly is that the closer an eventual leaver comes to the point of termination, the more his or her attitudes separate from the comparable stayer (see Exhibit 7). Thus, if a leaver is within a couple of months of leaving, his or her attitudes are clearly lower than comparable stayers; on the other hand, if he or she is at

least six months away from leaving, his or her attitudes are indistinguishable from those of someone who is not going to leave in six months.

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Insert Exhibit 7 About Here
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To put the total set of findings from this study in perspective: The respondents — that is, the management trainees — who left the organization voluntarily sometime during the first 15 months of employment typically had begun to show a marked decline in commitment to the organization prior to actually leaving it. These findings, taken together, would seem to point to the following conclusion: if an individual member of an organization begins to show or demonstrate a definite decline in commitment, it is a clear warning sign that a voluntary termination may occur within the near future. Termination can occur without this decline, but if it is there it likely has meaning for subsequent behavior.

The eighth and final study represented an attempt to reduce turnover in a controlled field experiment using 50 branches of a large west coast bank (Krackhardt et al, 1978). Twenty-five experimental branches were matched with twenty-five control branches based on branch size, location (residential vs. commercial) and average income-level of depositors. Based on pilot interviews with tellers and branch managers, it appeared that major factors influencing turnover among tellers included the following: 1) lack of opportunities for professional growth and development; 2) poor working conditions; 3) poor relationships with supervisors; and 4) communications problems.

As a result of these findings, a relatively simple experiment was initiated aimed at building commitment and reducing turnover by changing supervisory behavior. Specifically, a supervisory workshop was developed and instituted for branch managers in the experimental branches. The workship con-

sisted of two sessions. At the first session, supervisors were asked to identify factors they felt were contributing to turnover among subordinates. Then they were asked to go home and think about possible solutions. At the second session, one week later, supervisors were asked to generate several specific goals that they felt could be accomplished within a four-month period that would help reduce turnover. Agreement was reached on three primary goals:

1. Meet individually with each teller to discuss problems and provide feedback on performance.
2. Meet with tellers as a group at least four times during the study period to exchange information on work issues and problems and possible solutions.
3. Set up cross-training programs for those who want to broaden their skills. Focus on avenues of career development.

After the intervention, questionnaires were sent to tellers as a manipulation check and to measure attitudes. The expectations were that the invervention would lead to both increased commitment and reduced turnover over the next year.

What were the results? Several findings emerged. To begin with, the initial finding was that only some of the branches actually implemented the goals. This was, of course, disappointing and shows the importance of manipulation checks in field experiments.

Of those who actually implemented the goals, a rather immediate drop in commitment was found rather than an increase. While it is not known for certain, it is possible that this initial drop was caused by the heightened sensitivities raised by the problem-solving discussions and the raised expectations that changes must occur. Problem solving sessions focused on the negative

aspects of the job and this focus may have led employees to question their level of attachment to the job and organization. Subsequent measures showed a belated increase in organizational commitment. Finally, the intervention did lead to a significant decrease in turnover compared to the matched control groups. Hence, it was felt that for this particular sample, the intervention did have some impact on raising attitudes and reducing turnover.

Summary

In this paper, the topic of organizational commitment was introduced. It was noted that several typologies of commitment have been suggested. Based on this work, it was suggested that one meaningful way to organize our thoughts about this topic is to differentiate between commitment as an attitude and commitment as a category of behavior.

Our approach to defining attitudinal commitment suggests that commitment be viewed as the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization. According to this approach, commitment can be characterized by at least three factors, including: 1) a strong belief in and acceptance of organizational goals and values; 2) a willingness to exert considerable energy on behalf of the organization; and 3) a strong desire to maintain membership in the organization. Commitment as an attitude was contrasted with the more commonly studied attitude of job satisfaction.

A major portion of this paper attempted to summarize the available empirical work that has emerged concerning antecedents and outcomes of organizational commitment. It was noted that antecedents of commitment could be found in at least four separate areas: 1) personal characteristics; 2) role-related characteristics; 3) structural characteristics of the organization; and 4) work experiences. In addition, several consequences of commitment were discussed, the most prominent one being employee turnover.

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Exhibit 1 Typologies of Organizational Commitment

Author(s)	Typology	Definition
Etzioni (1961)	Moral involvement	A positive and high intensity orientation based upon internalization of organizational goals and values and identification with authority.
	Calculative involvement	A lower intensity relationship based upon a rational exchange of benefits and rewards.
	Alienative involvement	A negative orientation which is found in exploitative relationships (e.g., prisons).
Kanter (1968)	Continuance commitment	Dedication to organization's survival brought on by previous personal investments and sacrifice's such that leaving would be costly or impossible.
	Cohesion commitment	Attachment to social relationships in an organization brought on by such techniques as public renunciation of previous social ties or engaging in ceremonies which enhance group cohesion.
	Control commitment	Attachment to organizational norms which shape behavior in desired directions resulting from requiring members to publicly disavow previous norms and reformulate their self-conceptions in terms of organizational values.
Staw (1977); Salancik (1977)	Organizational behavior approach	Views commitment in terms of a strong identification with an involvement in the organization brought on by a variety of factors (a.k.a., attitudinal commitment).
	Social psychological approach	Views commitment in terms of sunk costs invested in the organization that bind the individual irrevocably to the organization (a.k.a., behavioral commitment).

Exhibit 2

Multiple Correlations Between Antecedents and Organizational Commitment for Samples of Hospital Employees and Scientists and Engineers

	Hospital Employees		Scientists & Engineers	
Antecedents	R	F-value	R	F-value
Personal characteristics	.55	24.96**	.42	3.28*
Job or role-related characteristics	.64	47.86**	.38	3.89*
Work experiences	.71	89.26**	.64	20.04**

Ns = 382 and 119, respectively
* Significant at .01 level
** Significant at .001 level

Source: Steers (1977a, p. 51)

Exhibit 3

Hypothesized Antecedents and Outcomes of Organizational Commitment

(adopted from Steers, 1977a)

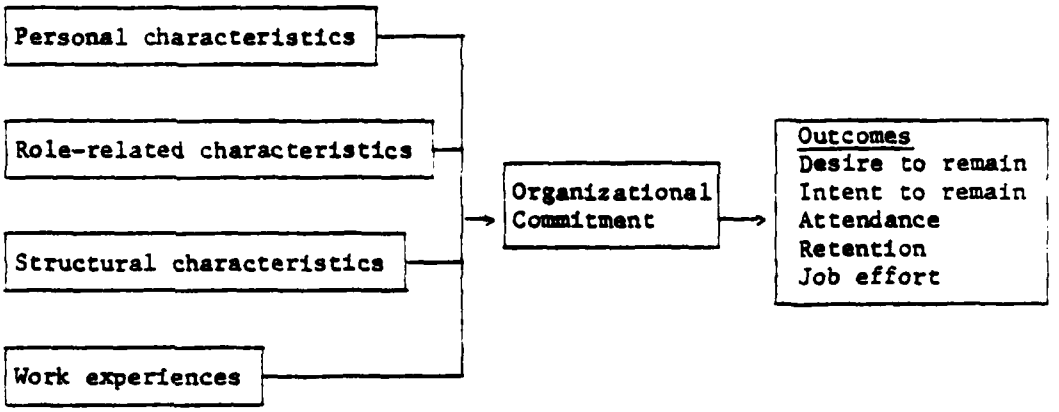


Exhibit 4

Comparison of Within versus Between Organization

Commitment Scores

Organizational Commitment	State University	Major Hospital	R&D Firm	Industrial Firm	F-ratio
Total Organization	4.73	5.21	4.43	5.37	17.94**
Occupational Groupings					
Administrative	4.84	5.14			
Professional	-	4.86			
Technical	-	5.34			
Clerical	4.55	5.02			
Service	4.57	5.36			
F-ratio	1.19	2.83			

Note: The F-ratio comparing the total organization commitment scores (17.94) is significant at the .001 level, while the two F-ratios comparing within-organization commitment scores (1.19 and 2.83) are insignificant. Due to the homogeneity of samples for the other two studies, no occupational differences were available. Details concerning samples and measures are available in Steers (1977a), Steers and Spencer (1977), and Morris and Steers (1980).

Exhibit 5

Summary of Empirical Findings with Respect to the Consequences of Organizational Commitment

	Performance	Tenure	Absenteeism	Tardiness	Turnover
Public Employees #1 (Koch & Steers, 1978)					-.38***
Public Employees #2 (Mowday et al., 1979)		.23***	-.13**		-.19***
Bank Employees (Mowday et al., 1974)	(see text)				
Hospital Employees[1] (Steers, 1977)	.05 .07 .11* .10*	.26**	.08		-.17**
Scientists & Engineers (Steers, 1977)			-.28**		
Psychiatric Technicians[2] (Porter et al., 1974)					-.02 -.32* -.43** -.43**
Retail Management Trainees[3] (Porter et al., 1976)	.36[4] .33[4] .20				-.41* -.43*
Part-time Military Personnel (Hom et al., 1979)					-.58*
Transit Workers (Angle & Perry, 1978)			.05	-.48*	-.48**

* Significant at the .05 level.
** Significant at the .01 level.
*** Significant at the .001 level.

1. For the hospital sample, four separate measures of performance were available for the one time period.
2. Results presented here are from four data points of a longitudinal study. Hence, the relationship between commitment and turnover increased over time.
3. Results for the turnover analysis presented are from two data points of a longitudinal study representing measures taken on the employees' first day and the last two months in the organization. Analysis for performance were available for measures taken at three points in time and represent cross-lag relationships between commitment and subsequent performance from 4 to 6 months, 6 to 9 months, and 4 to 9 months.
4. Correlations approached significance at the .05 level.

Exhibit 6

Discriminant Analysis Between Stayers and Leavers

for Commitment and Job Satisfaction

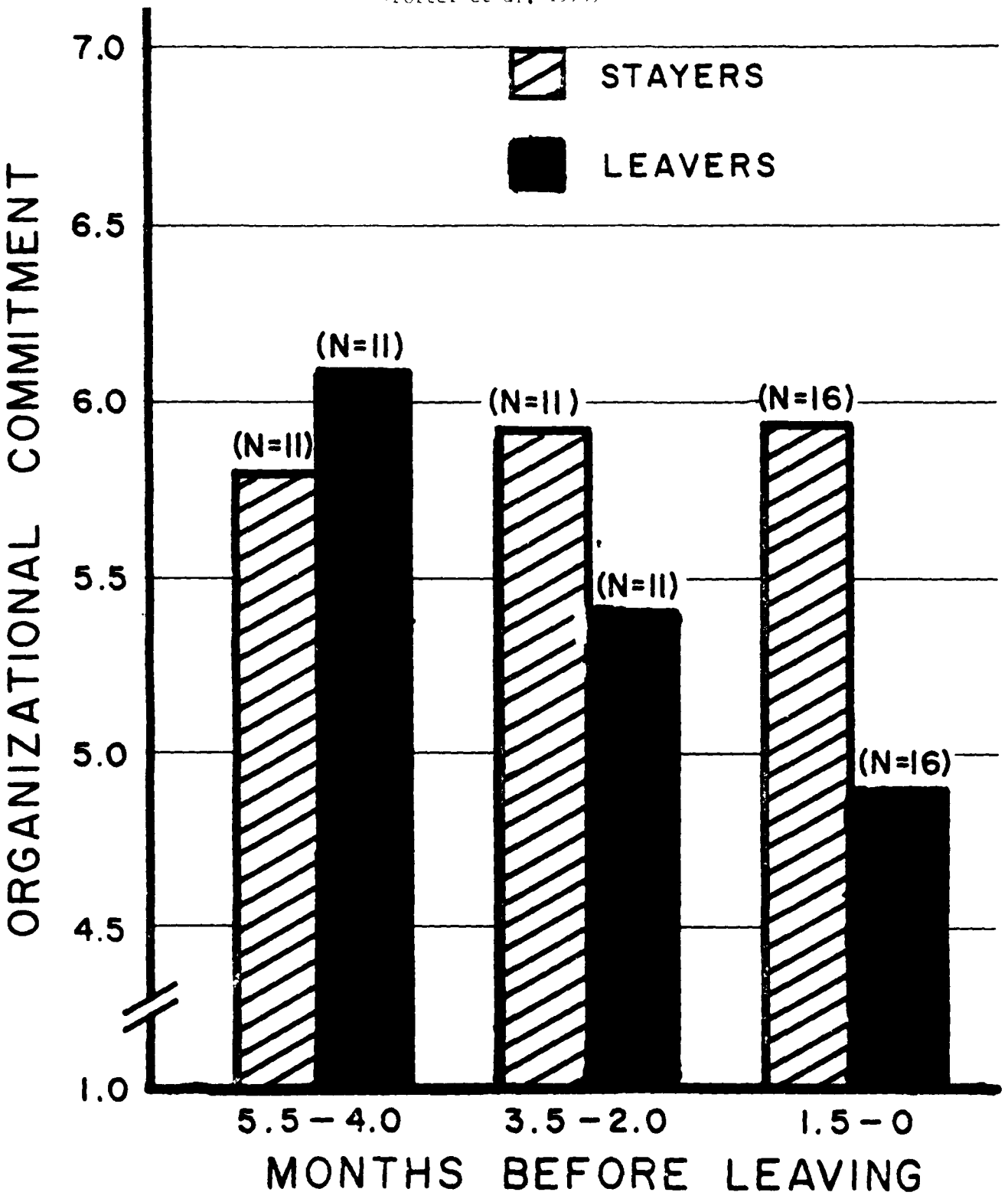
for Psychiatric Technicians

Variable	Time Period 1	Time Period 2	Time Period 3	Time Period 4
Std Discriminant Weights				
Organizational Commitment	-.12	1.04	1.04	1.43
JDI - Supervision	-.25	.05	-.24	-.12
JDI - Co-Workers	.48	-.38	-.19	-.25
JDI - Work	.57	.10	-.50	-.39
JDI - Pay	.85	-.18	-.01	-.28
JDI - Promotion	-.40	.19	.52	.01
Test Statistic	5.1	4.7	13.5*	13.0*
Degrees of Freedom	6	6	6	6
Total Discriminatory Power	12.5%	7.4%	20.7%	21.0%

(Source: Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian, 1974)

* Significant at the .05 level.

Exhibit 7. Degree of Organizational Commitment of Stayers vs. Leavers; Months before Leavers Terminate (Porter et al, 1976)



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LIST 5
BUMED

Commanding Officer
Naval Health Research Center
San Diego, CA 92152

CDR William S. Maynard
Psychology Department
Naval Regional Medical Center
San Diego, CA 92134

Naval Submarine Medical
Research Laboratory
Naval Submarine Base
New London, Box 900
Groton, CT 06349

Director, Medical Service Corps
Bureau of Medicine and Surgery
Code 23
Department of the Navy
Washington, DC 20372

Naval Aerospace Medical
Research Lab
Naval Air Station
Pensacola, FL 32508

Program Manager for Human
Performance
Naval Medical R&D Command
National Naval Medical Center
Bethesda, MD 20014

Navy Medical R&D Command
ATTN: Code 44
National Naval Medical Center
Bethesda, MD 20014

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LIST 6
NAVAL ACADEMY AND NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

Naval Postgraduate School
ATTN: Dr. Richard S. Elster
Department of Administrative Sciences
Monterey, CA 93940

Naval Postgraduate School
ATTN: Professor John Senger
Operations Research and
Administrative Science
Monterey, CA 93940

Superintendent
Naval Postgraduate School
Code 1424
Monterey, CA 93940

Naval Postgraduate School
ATTN: Dr. James Arima
Code 54-Aa
Monterey, CA 93940

Naval Postgraduate School
ATTN: Dr. Richard A. McGonigal
Code 54
Monterey, CA 93940

U.S. Naval Academy
ATTN: CDR J. M. McGrath
Department of Leadership and Law
Annapolis, MD 21402

Professor Carson K. Eoyang
Naval Postgraduate School, Code 54EG
Department of Administration Sciences
Monterey, CA 93940

Superintendent
ATTN: Director of Research
Naval Academy, U.S.
Annapolis, MD 21402

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LIST 7
HRM

Officer in Charge
Human Resource Management Detachment
Naval Air Station
Alameda, CA 94591

Officer in Charge
Human Resource Management Detachment
Naval Submarine Base New London
P.O. Box 81
Groton, CT 06340

Officer in Charge
Human Resource Management Division
Naval Air Station
Mayport, FL 32228

Commanding Officer
Human Resource Management Center
Pearl Harbor, HI 96860

Commander in Chief
Human Resource Management Division
U.S. Pacific Fleet
Pearl Harbor, HI 96860

Officer in Charge
Human Resource Management Detachment
Naval Base
Charleston, SC 29408

Commanding Officer
Human Resource Management School
Naval Air Station Memphis
Millington, TN 38054

Human Resource Management School
Naval Air Station Memphis (96)
Millington, TN 38054

Commanding Officer
Human Resource Management Center
1300 Wilson Boulevard
Arlington, VA 22209

Commanding Officer
Human Resource Management Center
5621-23 Tidewater Drive
Norfolk, VA 23511

Commander in Chief
Human Resource Management Division
U.S. Atlantic Fleet
Norfolk, VA 23511

Officer in Charge
Human Resource Management Detachment
Naval Air Station Whidbey Island
Oak Harbor, WA 98278

Commanding Officer
Human Resource Management Center
Box 23
FPO New York 09510

Commander in Chief
Human Resource Management Division
U.S. Naval Force Europe
FPO New York 09510

Officer in Charge
Human Resource Management Detachment
Box 60
FPO San Francisco 96651

Officer in Charge
Human Resource Management Detachment
COMNAVFORJAPAN
FPO Seattle 98762

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LIST 8
NAVY MISCELLANEOUS

Naval Military Personnel Command (2 copies)
HRM Department (NMPC-6)
Washington, DC 20350

Naval Training Analysis
and Evaluation Group
Orlando, FL 32813

Commanding Officer
ATTN: TIC, Bldg. 2068
Naval Training Equipment Center
Orlando, FL 32813

Chief of Naval Education
and Training (N-5)
Director, Research Development,
Test and Evaluation
Naval Air Station
Pensacola, FL 32508

Chief of Naval Technical Training
ATTN: Dr. Norman Kerr, Code 017
NAS Memphis (75)
Millington, TN 38054

Navy Recruiting Command
Head, Research and Analysis Branch
Code 434, Room 8001
801 North Randolph Street
Arlington, VA 22203

Commanding Officer
USS Carl Vinson (CVN-70)
Newport News Shipbuilding &
Drydock Company
Newport News, VA 23607

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LIST 9
USMC

Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps
Code MPI-20
Washington, DC 20380

Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps
ATTN: Dr. A. L. Slafkosky,
Code RD-1
Washington, DC 20380

Education Advisor
Education Center (E031)
MCDEC
Quantico, VA 22134

Commanding Officer
Education Center (E031)
MCDEC
Quantico, VA 22134

Commanding Officer
U.S. Marine Corps
Command and Staff College
Quantico, VA 22134

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LIST 10
DARPA

Defense Advanced Research (3 copies)
Projects Agency
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Technology Office
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Arlington, VA 22209

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International Public Policy
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6845 Elm Street, Suite 212
McLean, VA 22101

Dr. A. F. K. Organski
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Institute for Social Research
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Ann Arbor, MI 48106

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LIST 11
OTHER FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

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Defense Intelligence School
Washington, DC 20374

Dr. Brian Usilaner
GAO
Washington, DC 20548

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1200 19th Street, N.W.
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National Institute of Mental Health
Division of Extramural Research Programs
5600 Fishers Lane
Rockville, MD 20852

National Institute of Mental Health
Minority Group Mental Health Programs
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Office of Personnel Management
Office of Planning and Evaluation
Research Management Division
1900 E Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20415

Office of Personnel Management
ATTN: Ms. Carolyn Burstein
1900 E Street, NW.
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Office of Personnel Management
ATTN: Mr. Jeff Kane
Personnel R&D Center
1900 E Street, N.W.
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Chief, Psychological Research Branch
ATTN: Mr. Richard Lanterman
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Washington, DC 20593

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LIST II CONT'D

OTHER FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

Social and Developmental Psychology
Program
National Science Foundation
Washington, DC 20550

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LIST 12
ARMY

Headquarters, FORSCOM
ATTN: AFPR-HR
Ft. McPherson, GA 30330

Army Research Institute
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Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027

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Army Research Institute
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Director
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Director
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LIST 13
AIR FORCE

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Maxwell AFB, AL 36112

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LIST 14
MISCELLANEOUS

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British Embassy
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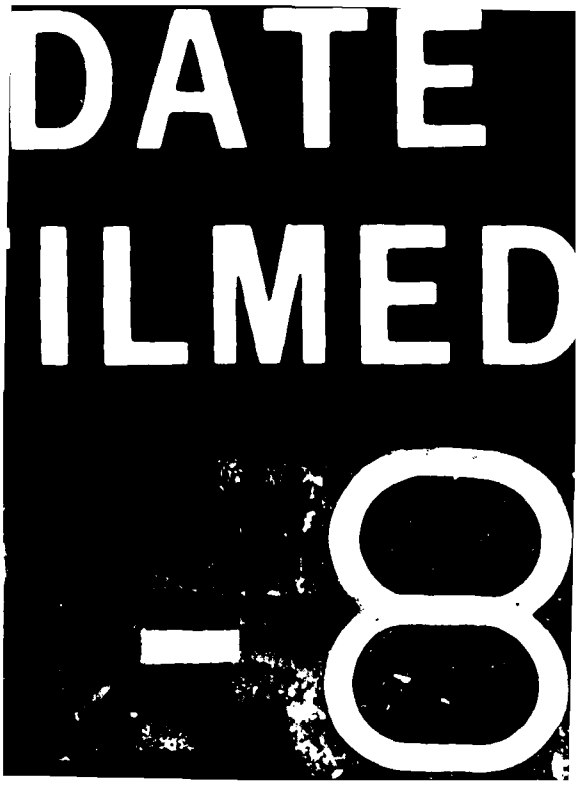
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